

February 2, 2010

To: Brent Platt, Western Region Director

From: Western Region Quality Improvement Committee

CC: Duane Betournay, DCFS Director

Our committee has been reviewing data in regards to the step-down of children in high-cost placements to family foster care homes that are willing to care for children that reach level 3 in their needs assessment. These homes have reported an increase of more serious behaviors and emotional needs that have our committee concerned that unless we find additional supports, we may lose these valuable homes. Because these homes generally have many years of experience and training, this region does not have additional families willing to "step up" and become what we call a structured foster family in the western region.

We would like to propose a cost saving pilot project to be implemented in the western region for the next 12 months, with reviews and updates to be submitted to administration on a quarterly basis. We expect to see that the amount of families will remain the same, or may increase and that the children placed in those homes will remain stable and be less likely to disrupt with the added support and systems that will be introduced during 2010.

First, as the state is having fewer options for high cost placements; we will more than likely be relying on experienced structured families to "fill in the gaps." The western region has stepped 20-30% of the kids down to a structured level of care within the past 12 months. The cost savings is tremendous; here is a breakdown of how much the state will save with only 10 kids dropping down one level, along with the cost savings of dropping down two levels.

- Residential Facility- \$35,325 (10 youth at \$117.75 per day in a 30 day month)
- Structured Foster Family Care- \$8400
  - o Cost Savings- \$26,925 per month/ \$323,100 per year
- Proctor Care- \$18,561 per month (10 youth at \$61.87 per day in a 30 day month)
- Structure Foster Family Care - \$8400
  - o Cost Savings- \$10,161 per month/ \$121,932 per year

As you can see, the step-down process is saving a tremendous amount of money each year for the state, aiding with the budget cuts and future cuts that will happen in 2010 and 2011. However, we see a likely decline in structured foster family care if there are not additional supports put into place. This is evident by the recent decline in structured foster families in the past 6 months by 14%. In talking to these families, the number one reason for not renewing their license was burn-out and lack of support by the division.

We would like to propose the following services to be piloted by the western region for the 2010 year.

1. Recruit and train relief home parents
  - a. Relief home parents would be licensed foster parents that are willing to stay two days per month in the structured foster families' home in order to give the foster family and opportunity to have rest.
  - b. Relief parents would get additional training by foster families so that they can be trained on the home rules and briefed on the needs of the children placed in their home. This will be better for the kids in foster care, because continuity and stability will be maintained while the foster family can get a short time period to reframe and recommit to children in care.
2. Create a Crisis Home
  - a. There are currently no options for families that have children that go into crisis. This home would be a licensed structured foster home that will only care for kids in crisis, but will maintain licensing requirements for space and gender.
  - b. This will be an important key in maintaining stability in placement for kids in structured homes. A "cooling off" period of one to two days during a crisis could help to maintain the integrity of the placement.
  - c. The committee also recommends that the western region take steps to ensure that a court pick-up order can be accessed over the weekends, as this is currently not happening at this time.
3. Utilize interns as support aids
  - a. Use interns to help with visitation and therapy appointments for families that more than four placements. Many homes in the western region are "mini group homes" and often have up to 6 kids placed in their homes at the same time.
4. Recruit in-home therapists
  - a. Identify and recruit therapists that are Medicaid approved providers that are willing to conduct therapy appointments in the home.
  - b. Many children report feeling more comfortable and open to working with a therapist in the comfort and familiarity of their home, rather than going to an office appointment.
  - c. This will also save money in mileage reimbursement to families, which adds to the savings identified above.

We feel that upon looking at data and research that these support measures will greatly impact the success of structured foster parents. We have also heard from parents that if services are improved, that they will most likely be willing to recruit additional families to help with high risk children, which will also increase savings to the state and the region.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Thank you,

Wendy Bunnell

Western Region QI committee Chair